

COVID 19 Outbreak and Eating Disorders – An Emerging Problem

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ABSTRACT

COVID 19 has been reported to exacerbate and precipitate depressive spells, anxiety spectrum disorders. Eating disorders that mainly include Anorexia Nervosa (AN) and Bulimia Nervosa (BN) can occur or flare up in such patients as well as an indirect influence of the pandemic. The nationwide lockdown, social isolation as well as psychiatric illnesses arising out of it can lead to such disorders. Further sample based studies are the need of the hour.

KEYWORDS: COVID 19, EATING DISORDERS

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INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 is having a negative impact on mental health of all the individuals in general [1]. Due to the infection itself as well as the isolation and containment rules Eating Disorders (ED) are increasing or worsening in preexisting cases. [2]

DISCUSSION

The negative impact of COVID-19 and the social isolation due to it on mental health has been established in literature. [1,2,3]. With a view of coping against the situational stress, populations are reporting alterations in patterns of their diet [4]. This includes increasing intake of food or taking more comfort food [4]. It leads to increases sense of guilt and anxiety that triggers a vicious cycle. One survey found that about 50% of the study participants had anxious preoccupations due to changed eating habits during COVID 19. It was seen that females were also more prone to emotional eating compared to male [4]. In a survey in New Delhi, 79.5% of total respondents reported that pattern of their diet changed during the lockdown in the country [5]. This was mostly in age group 35 - 50 years. They reported that in order to cope with the fears of getting infected with the virus and stringent restrictions of social distancing there was increase or decrease in their caloric intake [5].

Patients with pre existing eating disorders (EDs) are also going through adverse impacts related to the pandemic [6]. A study reported that after 2 weeks of quarantine, almost 40% adults with pre existing EDs had worsening of symptoms and almost 60% reported increase in anxiety [6].

In other countries, adults who had Anorexia Nervosa (AN) reported rise in restriction and fears of not having the ability to have food like their usual plan [6]. Those with BN and Binge Eating Disorder (BED) had rise in binge eating and binge urges. Almost all patients with EDs had higher worries regarding COVID-19 on their mental health compared to physical health, along with concerns of relapse of ED because of the confinement [7, 8].

CONCLUSION

Thus it is plausible to say that eating disorders are an important dilemma that is emerging in the world. India being a developing nation should be aware of such emergence more. Further sample based studies are needed to explore the phenomenology.

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